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August 13, 2004  
Immediate Release

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## **Environment Department and APS Make Progress in Effort to Improve School Air Quality**

(Santa Fe, NM) — Just in time for the back to school season, the New Mexico Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program recently completed training 27 Albuquerque Public Schools maintenance technicians on methods to improve the quality of the air students breathe.

The University of New Mexico Center for Regional Studies, in cooperation with the APS Health/Mental Health Department and the New Mexico Environment Department, conducted the maintenance training on July 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> in preparation for the upcoming school year. APS Environmental Management Division also assisted in the training. The training will augment the creation of indoor air quality teams in at least 20 elementary schools in the APS system.

Team members will be trained to identify and assess potential air quality problem areas using checklists and tools developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Targeted areas include school cafeteria operations, custodial chemical cleansing uses and laboratory materials care. Classroom assessments, including the proper use and storage of art materials and classroom animal pet care, are also part of the program.

“In addition to new notebooks and lunchboxes, I hope that kids in the APS system will also benefit from new, improved indoor air quality when they return to school this year,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry.

The New Mexico Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program, supported by the NMED, is a low cost voluntary program aimed at improving air quality and energy conservation practices in New Mexico schools.

One of the primary goals of the program is to reduce triggers that may cause asthma episodes in children. Asthma among children has more than doubled in America over the past twenty years and is a leading cause of missed school days.

“Developing a healthier environment for our kids will help them learn and therefore improve the quality of the education they receive,” said Senator Bernadette Sanchez, an educator and sponsor of the original state funding for this program.

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“Most of the air in the classroom, especially during winter months, passes through the school’s heating, ventilation and air conditioning system,” said Matthew Baca, UNM Research Programs Manager. “As such, maintenance technicians and plant engineers play an enormous role in school children health care. During the training, APS Nursing provided invaluable information on likely triggers and their effects, while technical sessions by APS Environmental Management and a professional engineer showed how to mitigate those triggers in the heating and cooling systems.”

As part of an EPA grant to the state, program implementation will also commence in the fall at 17 schools in the Gadsden Independent School District, which is located along the Mexico border in south central New Mexico.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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